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Dismantling of plants for the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons

Working paper submitted by France

France is the only State to have closed and dismantled all of its facilities for the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons.

Production shut down

France ceased the production of fissile material for its nuclear weapons in 1992 (plutonium) and 1996 (highly enriched uranium). In 1996, it announced a moratorium on the production of these materials. At the same time, France decided to begin dismantling the plants concerned.

Production facilities

- Highly enriched uranium: the enrichment plant at Pierrelatte, which operated from 1964 to 1996
- Plutonium: produced in plutonium-producing G1, G2 and G3 reactors at Marcoule (1956-1984), then separated at the UP1 reprocessing plant at Marcoule, established in 1958 and shut down in 1997

Dismantlement of facilities

The dismantlement programme was launched immediately after production was shut down. This dismantlement is irreversible. It thus entails a considerable financial commitment and presents a challenge in terms of implementation and expertise.

Dismantlement phases and key figures

- Total of 6 billion euros, of which 2 billion have already been invested
- Pierrelatte: six years of preparation; work began in 2002; completion expected in 2010; 4,000 diffusers; 1,330 tons of diffusion barriers; 1,200 km of pipes and 20,000 tons of very-low-activity waste

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Please recycle

- Marcoule: the first phase of cleaning dismantling of G1, G2 and G3 has been completed; 4,000 tons of scrap metal moved to the very-low-level radioactive waste storage centre in Aube; second phase scheduled for 2020-2035; dismantlement of the UP1 plant began in 1997, scheduled to last until 2035

Transparency and international commitment

France organized visits to its facilities on 16 September 2008 for the representatives of more than 40 States members of the Conference on Disarmament, on 16 March 2009 for non-governmental experts and on 3 July 2009 for foreign journalists. France is the only nuclear-weapon State to have opened the doors of its former facilities for the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons to the international community.

The European Union disarmament plan of action

- Adopted in December 2008 under the French Presidency
- Calls for the immediate commencement of negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons
- Calls for the immediate establishment of a moratorium on the production of such materials
- Calls for all concerned States to dismantle their production capacities